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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE  
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INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

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SUBJECT: MANY BATSWANA SOMEWHAT DUBIOUS ABOUT U.S.  
STRIKES

1. SUMMARY: ENERGETIC OUTREACH EFFORTS BY THE AMBASSADOR AND MISSION STAFF REVEAL THAT INITIAL SYMPATHY FOR THE U.S. POST-SEPTEMBER 11 HAS ERODED WITH RECENT AIRSTRIKES AGAINST THE TALIBAN. BATSWANA QUESTION U.S. FOREIGN POLICIES; COMPARE THE ASCETIC IMAGE OF OSAMA BIN LADEN WITH THE ARRAY OF TECHNICAL WEAPONS BEING AIMED AT HIM; AND TALLY THE CIVILIAN CASUALTIES OF STRIKES AGAINST THE TALIBAN. THEY ASK FOR HARD PROOF OF BIN LADEN'S GUILT; THEY FEAR THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE WORLD OF A HEAD-ON CONFRONTATION WITH TERROR. ULTIMATELY HOWEVER, THEY VIEW SEPTEMBER 11 - AND TERRORISM IN GENERAL - AS SOMEONE ELSE'S PROBLEM, NOT THEIRS. OUR SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO WIN GOB SUPPORT COME IN THE FACE OF SOME LOCAL MEDIA WHICH PRESS THE GOB TO REMAIN NEUTRAL. OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH LOCAL EDITORS, MUSLIM OFFICIALS, BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS, AND KEY OPINION MAKERS HAVE SLOWED, BUT NOT STOPPED, THIS TREND. END SUMMARY.

EXPRESSIONS OF DOUBT

2. THE AMBASSADOR'S 10/9 MEETING WITH THREE MEDIA EDITORS WAS ILLUSTRATIVE OF MANY OF THE CONVERSATIONS HELD BY MISSION STAFF. THE THREE VOLUNTEERED THAT THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS WERE EVIL, AND IN NO WAY JUSTIFIED. THERE WAS AN IMMEDIATE WAVE OF SYMPATHY AND RESPECT FOR THE USG WHICH BEGAN TO DIMINISH AS IT BECAME APPARENT THE USG WOULD RESPOND WITH SIGNIFICANT FORCE. THE EDITORS WERE NOT CONVINCED UBL WAS GUILTY, EVEN THOUGH THEY CONCEDED HE LIKELY WAS, AND SUGGESTED THAT THE USG SHOULD WORK HARDER TO MAKE ITS PUBLIC CASE. OVERALL THE EDITORS FELT BATSWANA REACTION TO THE AIRSTRIKES WAS MIXED.

3. THE EDITORS ALSO QUESTIONED THE MEANS THE USG WAS USING TO TRY AND APPREHEND UBL. MEDIA DEPICTED UBL AS AN ASCETIC (ONE EDITOR SAID "A SAINT") WHO HAD RENOUNCED AN OSTENTATIOUS LIFESTYLE TO FIGHT WARS OF LIBERATION. HE WAS PHOTOGRAPHED IN ROBES IN THE DESERT, SOMETIMES WITH HIS FAMILY. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THE PUBLIC TO IMPUTE TO HIM THE CRIMES HE IS CHARGED WITH WHEN THEY ARE FACED WITH THESE IMAGES. OPPOSITE THIS SIMPLE FIGURE STOOD THE ARMED MIGHT OF THE USG, WITH SMART BOMBS AND HIGH-TECH AIRCRAFT POISED TO ATTACK. THE AMBASSADOR DESCRIBED THE UBL NETWORK OF ASSOCIATES, THE COMMITMENT TO TERROR, THE POSSIBLE STOCK MARKET MANIPULATIONS TO STRESS THAT THIS WAS NOT A SIMPLE MAN OR ORGANIZATION. THE EDITORS RETURNED REPEATEDLY, HOWEVER, TO THE IDEA THAT THE USG WAS TRYING TO APPREHEND AN INDIVIDUAL BY USING OVERWHELMING, AND POSSIBLY INDISCRIMINATE, FORCE. THEY HAD LITTLE INTEREST IN THE TALIBAN; THEY DID GIVE A GREAT DEAL OF WEIGHT TO CIVILIAN DEATHS CAUSED BY USG ATTACKS AND THE REFUGEE FLOWS OUT OF AFGHANISTAN. FINALLY, THEY NOTED THAT RESPONSES TO SEPTEMBER 11 COULD GENERATE A NEW ROUND OF TERRORIST ATTACKS BY GROUPS NOT EVEN ASSOCIATED WITH SEPTEMBER 11 BUT NOW RESPONDING TO ATTACKS ON THEIR COLLEAGUES.

4. PRESSED TO OFFER BETTER ALTERNATIVES, SOME SUGGESTED RELYING MORE ON THE UN AND A BROADER COALITION EFFORT SO THAT IT DID NOT LOOK LIKE A US-ONLY EFFORT. ANOTHER SUGGESTED PUBLICIZING A STRONGER CASE AGAINST UBL. ALL CONCURRED THAT THE USG SHOULD CONSIDER OTHER, MORE DIRECTED, MEANS PROPORTIONATE TO ITS ENDS - JUSTICE AGAINST THE PERPETRATORS OF

SEPTEMBER 11. THEY ALSO SEVERAL TIMES SUGGESTED THAT THE U.S. WAS PERCEIVED AS A "BULLY" INTERNATIONALLY, AND THAT THE WAR ON TERRORISM LOSES GENERAL APPEAL THE MORE IT IS VIEWED AS PRIMARILY A U.S. EFFORT.

OUTRIGHT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE USG

15. BOTSWANA MEDIA AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR HAVE BEEN ON BALANCE MORE NEGATIVE THAN POSITIVE ABOUT THE US. USING LOCAL AUTHORS AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL PRESS SERVICE PIECES, THE PRIVATE PRESS HAS ARGUED THAT THE U.S.'S UNILATERAL APPROACH TO DIPLOMACY AND ITS MIDDLE EAST POLICIES CONTRIBUTED TO THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS. PRESS HAS ALSO REPORTED CONCERN THAT U.S.-LED ATTACKS MAY PROMPT RETALIATIONS. ONE PAPER EXTENSIVELY REPORTED ON A TRAVELLING AMERICAN FAMILY'S BELIEF THAT RECENT U.S. ACTIONS WERE IN ERROR; THE PIECE RAN IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE AMBASSADOR'S OP-ED ON WHY BOTSWANA SHOULD SUPPORT THE U.S. LETTERS HAVE ALSO CRITICIZED THE GOB FOR CHOOSING TO SIDE WITH THE U.S. IN NO CASE, HOWEVER, HAVE MEDIA ADVOCATED ACTIONS AGAINST THE UNITED STATES, ITS CITIZENS OR INSTALLATIONS.

16. AMBASSADOR, POL/ECON CHIEF AND OTHERS HAVE EXTENSIVELY ENGAGED THE ONLY HUMAN RIGHTS NGO IN GABORONE, DITSHWANELO, ON BOTH THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS AND THE OCTOBER 8 STRIKES. ALICE MOGWE, THE ORGANIZATION'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HAS CONSISTENTLY ARGUED THAT LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PROSECUTION OF THE GUILTY WAS THE ONLY LEGITIMATE MEANS OF RESPONSE TO THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATROCITIES. HER ORGANIZATION'S VIEWS HAVE ALSO BEEN PUBLISHED IN THE LOCAL MEDIA.

AND SUPPORT FOR OUR APPROACH

17. BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL SECTORS HAVE BEEN MORE SUPPORTIVE. BUSINESS TRAVELLERS RETURNING TO BOTSWANA RECOUNT NEW RESTRICTIONS AT AIRPORTS, AND CLOSE CALLS BY FAMILY OR COLLEAGUES, ANECDOTES WHICH BRING THE REALITY OF SEPTEMBER 11 CLOSER TO HOME. AFTER THE AMBASSADOR'S 10/12 SPEECH TO THE ROTARY CLUB, PARTICIPANTS WERE MORE WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT TERRORISM COULD TAKE PLACE IN BOTSWANA AND THAT THE GLOBAL COALITION ON TERRORISM MUST SUCCEED. THEY WERE ALSO CURIOUS TO LEARN WHETHER THE USG WOULD SHIFT SOME OF ITS MIDDLE EAST POLICIES AS A RESULT OF THE ATTACKS. AMBASSADOR'S AND PAO'S CONTACTS WITH ACADEMICS ALSO ENCOUNTER A GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE VIEW.

18. COMMENT: PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE U.S. POST-OCTOBER 8 HAS GENERALLY COME FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND ELITES; WE SUSPECT THERE IS MORE UNSTATED POPULAR SUPPORT THAN REGISTERS IN THE PRESS. WE WILL CONTINUE TO TARGET OUTREACH PROGRAMS AT THAT BROADER BUT LESS-DEFINED SPECTRUM OF BATSWANA WHO HARBOR CONTINUED DOUBTS ABOUT UBL GUILT, USG RESPONSE AND QUESTION THE RELEVANCE OF SEPTEMBER 11 TO BOTSWANA.

LANGE